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# Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

Paul Powell

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# NEWS

from the office of

**PAUL POWELL**

Secretary of State

Springfield (62706)

Telephone: Area Code 217 525-2876

Remarks by

Secretary of State Paul Powell

at dedication of bust of Abraham Lincoln

St. Nicholas Hotel lobby

~~6:30~~ — 5:30 p.m.

February 20, 1970

I am indeed pleased to participate in the dedication of the remodeled St. Nicholas Hotel, because it has been my Springfield residence since 1934. Its walls have given comfort and nourishment to many guests, and today it is the oldest hotel name in Springfield.

Its history began on August 23, 1855, when a physician, Dr. John D. Freeman, purchased lot 4 in block 10 from Archer G. and Rebecca Hern<sup>d</sup>son for \$3,800. Being a gifted man, he drew the plans himself for a fine four-story hotel. Early in April of 1856, burly workmen began excavating for the sturdy foundations needed to carry the weight of a brick structure extending 62 feet along Jefferson street and 126 along Fourth. When completed, the hotel was named the St. Nicholas. In that period of time there were in various large cities several prominent hotels named St. Nicholas. Dr. Freeman was probably impressed with the one in Chicago by that name. His Springfield version cost \$15,000 and contained 66 rooms on the top three floors, the first level being given over to shops and businesses. Rooms rented for two and three dollars, but champagne<sup>e</sup> sold for \$2.50 a bottle.

A grand opening was held on Monday, January 5, 1857, the same day that the 20th General Assembly convened in the nearby Capitol building. Springfield was bulging with dignitaries,

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and the hotel clerk at the St. Nicholas boasted that many of them were registered in his book. Leading the roster were Governor and Mrs. Joel A. Matteson, Dr. Charles H. Ray, prominent editor of the Chicago Tribune, Isaac N. Arnold and Richard Yates.

From that date forward, the St. Nicholas served many famous guests but none more famous than Abraham Lincoln himself. On July 5, 1858, Lincoln joined the Pioneer Fire company of Springfield and the Union Fire company of Jacksonville for a banquet in the St. Nicholas Hotel. For over two hours the firemen and their guests ate and drank toasts. When the jolly celebrators turned to Lincoln, the tall barrister rose to his full height and gave this pledge: " 'The Pioneer Fire company.' May they extinguish all the bad flames, but keep the flame of patriotism ever burning brightly in the hearts of the ladies."

But it was as President-elect that Lincoln spent the most time in this hotel. On Christmas day at 6 p.m. in 1860 the noted Cincinnati sculptor Thomas D. Jones arrived in Springfield to fashion a bust of Lincoln. Jones had already modeled (from life) Henry Clay; General Zachary Taylor; General Lewis Cass; General Winfield Scott; Daniel Webster; John C. Breckinridge, the Vice President; Salmon P. Chase and many others of like note. Now his assignment--for which he was never paid--was the newly-elected Abraham Lincoln.

Jones selected the St. Nicholas for his quarters and moved into a room on the fourth floor. Said the sculptor with pride: "It is the best, and cleanest house in town." After Lincoln discovered that Jones would not make a plaster cast of his face as had Leonard Volk, causing the former railsplitter no small amount of discomfort, the President-elect quickly agreed to give the sculptor from Cincinnati daily sittings.

Having only his hotel room for a studio, Jones invited Lincoln to come there for the modeling. By December 30 Lincoln

had posed for two sketches. Then began the task of molding Lincoln's bust in clay. For at least an hour each morning, Lincoln disappeared from the hectic press of reporters and patronage seekers and sat relaxed in Jones' hotel room. It was a very pleasant interlude for Lincoln. He sometimes read his voluminous mail and composed answers to important political figures. More important, it was in the St. Nicholas Hotel that Lincoln wrote the several speeches which he gave as his special train made scheduled stops all along the route to Washington, D.C. and it was here that he polished his first inaugural address. Yes, the St. Nicholas Hotel played an important part in the life of Abraham Lincoln.

Tom Jones had a great advantage over other sculptors and artists. By posing Lincoln in his hotel room, Jones was able to observe his subject under ideal conditions. Lincoln was relaxed, he joked with Jones, and his face became mobile -- not stiff as registered by the time-exposure photographs taken in his era. As a result, Jones probably executed the most life-like bust ever made of the sixteenth President. There is the typical merry twinkle in Lincoln's eyes, and his face betrays a slight smile which colleagues spoke of and reported but which photographs did not capture.

Until his departure from Springfield on February 11, 1861, Lincoln continued to pose for Jones. By that time, the sculptor had completed the important details and had marked out the rough outlines of the draperies since Jones' work was of the classical type. For a month and a half he had observed Lincoln under many conditions, even by gaslight and in Lincoln's own home as the special guest who brought father Abraham the late mail from downtown.

After seeing Lincoln off at the Great Western Depot, Jones escorted Mrs. Lincoln and the boys back to their lodgings, the Chenery House. Then he returned to his modeling in the

St. Nicholas. Within a few months, army officers were being subsisted at state expense downstairs in the St. Nicholas, while upstairs Jones continued to work on his figure of their commander-in-chief. The war had now come to Illinois.

Not until about July 2, 1861, did Jones complete the bust. He was a painstaking craftsman of great ability. Indeed his final product had caught the very essence of Lincoln's appearance and character. A group of local citizens petitioned the city to secure a copy of Jones' bust since it was a likeness so faithful to the original. Nothing more was heard of this petition. The city fathers were unmoved.

Undaunted, Jones made a mold from his statue, thus destroying the original clay model. From this he cast a bust in plaster and displayed it on the west side of the square in G. W. Chatterton's jewelry store. The proud sculptor advertised that he would gladly make plaster casts for those who might desire one. Only Lincoln's faithful dentist, Dr. Amos Willard French, seems to have obtained a copy. Some citizens proposed that the state officials obtain a marble copy for the state library in the Capitol, but no order was forthcoming. William Butler, the state treasurer, had been closely associated with Lincoln for years, but he excused himself from buying a copy of the bust by asking, "Suppose Mr. Lincoln should disgrace himself, what would we do with his bust?" So, the Illinois State Library never received Jones' bust of Abraham Lincoln.

By September of 1861 Tom Jones had returned to his studio in Cincinnati. He produced only a very few copies of his statue; one of these he shipped off to the White House where it was prominently displayed in the Red Room.

When the telegraph wires brought to Cincinnati the tragic bulletin that Abraham Lincoln had been assassinated, orders began to pour into Jones' studio for a copy of his marvelous bust of Lincoln. Having an artist's temperament,



Jones ignored the requests. If his prospective patrons had not wanted a copy in 1861, they were not going to get one in 1865! Instead, Jones continued to model a cabinet-size head of the martyred President, his project at that moment.

For this reason, Jones' bust of Lincoln is one of the rarest items of Lincolniana today. When the St. Nicholas Hotel remodeled its lobby, the directors sought a copy for permanent display. After weeks of searching, King V. Hostick discovered one in the east. It is now proudly shown in this hotel where Lincoln posed for it. Of course, the present building was constructed in 1924 and 1925, but the site is the same.

And yet there is another tale to tell about Jones' bust of Abraham Lincoln. When the old State House was restored recently on the public square of Springfield, James T. Hickey and others in charge of the project learned from one of my staff that Jones' bust had never been placed in the State Library room as intended by leading local citizens back in 1861. With a deep sense of not only history but also justice, Mr. Hickey procured another copy of the bust. There it sits today for visitors to admire in the restored Illinois State Library room. Since the Secretary of State was then and is today the State Librarian, I am very proud that Jones' excellent bust of Lincoln now stands in that room.

Springfield is very fortunate to possess two copies of this statue. Only a handful are known today. After over 100 years, the mistakes of the past have been corrected. Illinois' capital city has secured two original copies of this statue which was made right here in our very midst. Yes, a prophet is sometimes only without honor in his own home town.

Congratulations to the St. Nicholas Hotel for displaying this bust of the immortal Lincoln, who brought honor to this city, state and nation.





